In “Anna Karenina,” Tolstoy tells us, “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

So it is, too, with major corporations, which often face similar HR struggles, but experience them in unique ways.

For the 70-plus partner companies of the Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies (CAHRS), research informs practice to give them the competitive edge.

Now in its 26th year, CAHRS brings together top academic researchers in the field of HR and the world’s foremost HR practitioners. The result is intelligent, civilized discourse on issues of mutual interest.

Most of CAHRS’ partner companies are Fortune 200 companies, such as IBM, General Electric, Microsoft, Amazon, American Express, Barclays Bank and Hewlett-Packard.

Other partner companies, despite having smaller profiles and revenue streams, share similar human capital issues with the Fortune 200. “We run the gamut from manufacturing-focused industries all the way to high-tech and software,” says CAHRS Managing Director Steve Miranda.

“CAHRS exists to give practitioners access to research that can help them solve their problems,” he says. “ILR faculty members form the nucleus of the value proposition to our partner companies.”

As partners, companies can participate in working groups convened to address a specific topic. Themes typically revolve around globalization, technology, or demographics and social trends.

Partner companies can also participate in university classes and executive education, use the world-class resources of the Cathderwood Library, and network with other CAHRS partners.

“Sometimes, companies are on the edge of the practice,” Miranda says. “Other times, they’re thinking about adopting the practice, and they get a chance to chat with people who have been through the gauntlet and are willing to share what they learned from the experience.”

“They get an affirmation that the track they’re on is the right one, or a warning that the track they’re going down may not be optimal.”

“It’s almost as if they have access to a buddy network—a group of mentors and colleagues who have faced similar issues that they can instantly tap into to check on whether an idea, a program, an initiative, or a new system that they’re about to put in place will work. They also learn to avoid the pitfalls.”

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The experience, she says, has influenced her approach to “how we prepare the pipeline of HR talent.”

“CAHRS has spurred greater thought about how I invest in the development of my team at all levels of the organization,” she says.

“What’s great about CAHRS is it’s large enough to have a good range of thoughtful and sophisticated companies, represented by people who care about the human dimension of their business and understand the role that can play in making their companies successful.”

“At the same time, it is intimate. It’s not such a large group that it feels like some big conference or invitational. You can build relationships. Through the faculty, you get the kind of personalized advice and thoughtfulness that can help you gain new perspective.”